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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST VIEWS
ON THE US NEGOTIATING POSITION

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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Note: This memorandum has been produced by the Office of Current Intelligence. The conclusions contained in the Summary were concurred in by the Board of National Estimates and the Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs in the Office of the Director of Central Intelligence.

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
3 October 1966

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Vietnamese Communist Views on the
US Negotiating Position

Summary and Conclusions

1. The Vietnamese Communist rejection of US peace offers arises out of the fundamentally opposing goals of the two sides in the conflict. The North Vietnamese view Vietnam as a single country, temporarily and unjustly split into two parts. They believe that without US intervention, which for the moment frustrates their ambitions, they could complete their revolution and gain full control of that country. The end result desired by the United States, however, is a viable non-Communist regime in South Vietnam freed of the constant threat of aggression from North Vietnam. That the United States is attempting to achieve this end, either on the battlefield or through negotiations, the Communists do not doubt. It is a result, however, that they are unwilling to concede.

2. Beyond this fundamental obstacle to any meeting of the minds, there are certain aspects of the US peace offers which the Communists view with great suspicion. There is considerable evidence, both in private statements by the Communists and in the reports of competent Western officials who have talked with them, that charges of US bad faith are not solely propagandistic but reflect deeply held beliefs. There are a number of reasons for these suspicions. First, the Marxist-Leninist training of

the Communists axiomatically imputes a basic dishonesty to all capitalist powers. More important, analysis of the Communists' statements and actions indicates that they firmly believe that the US not only is bent on winning a military victory in Vietnam but intends to maintain its presence in South Vietnam through a puppet regime supported by US military bases.

3. This distrust has been reinforced by their experience with the Geneva agreement of 1954. In their view, that agreement was a device to permit the French to withdraw with some shred of grace in exchange for terms that assured the Communists of subsequently gaining control of the entire country through a general election. The Communists feel defrauded by the actual outcome. After this experience, they genuinely regard US proposals to negotiate as another device to defraud them of the victory that would otherwise be theirs. In such circumstances, nothing the US can do would convince the Vietnamese Communists of its sincerity, short of surrendering to them effective control of South Vietnam.

4. The problem of getting US goodwill across to the Communists is further compounded by the fact that they have so far regarded the specific formulations of US peace bids as unpalatable and unacceptable. There is considerable evidence indicating that they believe the US has not yet made any real concessions in its position in order to start talks. They are convinced, moreover, that the US is not really interested in a cessation of military action in Vietnam. They consistently point to new American military deployments and offensive actions as indications of a deep-seated US desire to continue the fighting.

5. Vietnamese suspicions, however, will not be the critical factor in getting talks on the conflict started. If and when the Communists decide to agree to talks, their decision will be based primarily on their assessment of the relative power position of

both sides. This attitude is evident from their own private statements, from the impressions of Western envoys, and from analysis of Western experience in the Korean and Laotian wars.

6. The Vietnamese Communists believe that major policy concessions can eventually be forced from the US, since they estimate that they can outlast the US in a protracted war. It appears that they feel deeply that time is on their side. Their private statements, again, are very strong and consistent on this point. They also appear to have an optimistic estimate at present of their relative strategic position vis-a-vis the US forces in Vietnam. They certainly do not believe that the allies will have enough combat forces in South Vietnam by the end of 1966 to inflict a decisive defeat on them.

7. They probably estimate that they will still retain a powerful hand in South Vietnam if they can maintain the bulk of their regular units intact in the face of the anticipated level of allied buildup. In their view, they will then retain the option of protracting the war. In this strategy, they are probably encouraged by their increasing success in coping with the aerial attacks on North Vietnam and by their ability to move substantial forces across the DMZ into northern South Vietnam. They are taking a strong stance in this area where supply lines are shorter and a positional type of war can be fought, probably with better support from antiaircraft artillery.

8. An element in the Communist strategy of protracted war is the belief that important domestic opposition may develop in the US as a result of continuing US casualties and the economic pinch of the conflict on the American economy. The Communists have consistently shown that they overestimate the real intensity and true direction of domestic opposition to US policy on Vietnam. Their statements provide substantial proof of this. They appear to believe, for example, that those who oppose negotiation and urge greater military action constitute only a tiny minority of the American public.

9. Although direct evidence on the point is scanty, it seems probable that the Vietnamese Communists believe the US underestimates the depth of their determination on the war. It appears, in fact, that they expect a moderation of US policy may come about when Washington realizes the strength of the Vietnamese will.

10. The available evidence indicates that the dedication of the Communists to the unification of Vietnam under Communist hegemony is extremely strong, and that their will to accomplish this objective has not been appreciably reduced as a result of the heavier military pressure placed on them during the last two years. Although it is possible that there is a faction of Vietnamese Communist leaders who do not share this depth of dedication, the hard evidence on the subject points to a surprising unanimity of view on continuing the war. The slight differences evident from time to time in the statements of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese leaders on peace terms are, we believe, mainly a tactical device to demonstrate Viet Cong "independence." The evidence of North Vietnamese domination and control of the National Front and the Viet Cong is overwhelming.

11. It appears that the population under Vietnamese Communist control will follow the policy dictates of its leaders adequately for the foreseeable future. It does not seem likely that influences for moderation, if any, from the Soviet bloc would have any appreciable effect on the Vietnamese will to persist.

12. Since the Vietnamese Communists believe the US must be forced into concessions, it follows that one of their major concerns is to maintain an image of strength during the fighting and particularly prior to the start of any talks on the war. All good evidence on their strategy has tended to confirm this proposition. It is almost certain that they will not agree to any negotiations until the US stops bombing North Vietnam and promises not to resume the air attacks. This has been a completely

consistent theme in both their public and private statements and in the reports of Western diplomats who have talked with them.

13. In view of their stated position, and their probable estimate of their strategic position at the present time in the war, it appears almost certain that any US move for peace that is formulated in a manner requiring a meaningful reciprocal action by the Communists is foredoomed to rejection. It is probable, in fact, that even if such a proposal is advanced privately it will be rejected.

14. At this stage of the war, it appears likely that only a US proposal accompanied by a clearcut and significant concession in American military policy that did not require a quid pro quo by the Communists would have any chance of gaining their agreement to bilateral negotiations with the US. It is entirely possible that they would refuse to agree to bilateral talks even in the event of a major US concession. They might take advantage of the partial respite from military pressure while demanding additional concessions before talks.

15. There follows a more detailed examination of the above issues, including some of the specific data and information underlying our conclusions. A discussion of the specific Vietnamese Communist proposals for peace, as embodied in the DRV's four points and the Front's five-point statement, is also appended.

Section I

US GOODWILL QUESTIONED

1. Despite American efforts to demonstrate in a variety of ways that US peace initiatives in Vietnam have been made in good faith, it is clear from both the public and private statements of the Vietnamese Communists that they continue to doubt the sincerity of the US' stated willingness to negotiate an equitable settlement. The evidence strongly indicates that the views of Hanoi and the Viet Cong on this question go well beyond the propaganda objectives we would expect them to try to gain by slandering US goodwill. It appears that their suspicions actually reflect deeply held beliefs.

The Communist Charges

2. Allegations concerning the fraudulent nature of US peace moves have been consistently and prominently featured in Vietnamese Communist propaganda. Such denunciations, for example, were a basic theme of Hanoi's response to President Johnson's declaration on 7 April 1965 that the US stood ready to enter into negotiations without preconditions. Hoang Quoc Viet, one of the foremost North Vietnamese spokesmen on the war, charged that the President's offer was nothing but a "trick" aimed at covering up US "crimes and acts of war." The same term was used repeatedly by the Vietnamese Communists in their denunciation of the initial suspension in the bombing of North Vietnam which took place from 12 to 18 May 1965.

3. In late December 1965, when the US coupled a new suspension of the aerial attacks with worldwide diplomatic probes for peace openings, the Vietnamese Communists again responded with charges assailing the US moves as "deceptive." According to a Hanoi commentary on 31 December, the US had not really shown the "least sign of desire" for a peaceful settlement despite its actions. Similar allegations have continued routinely during 1966. In late August, the chairman of the Viet Cong's Liberation Front, Nguyen Huu Tho,

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denounced the "honeylike" but "insincere" US words about peace. At the DRV National Day celebrations in September, Premier Pham Van Dong labeled American peace overtures a "shameless trick."

4. The striking persistence of these charges in the public statements of the Vietnamese Communists suggests, in itself, that they are more than just propaganda slogans. That they genuinely distrust the US has been confirmed in reports from numerous free world diplomats and officials who have talked with the Vietnamese Communists.

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The Reasons for Communist Distrust

6. Analysis of statements and actions of the Vietnamese Communists indicates that they believe the US is, in reality, bent on winning a military victory in Vietnam. They appear to believe that the US envisions, at the very least, the elimination of the Viet Cong as an armed threat in the South. Given this appraisal, it would follow for the Communists

[REDACTED]

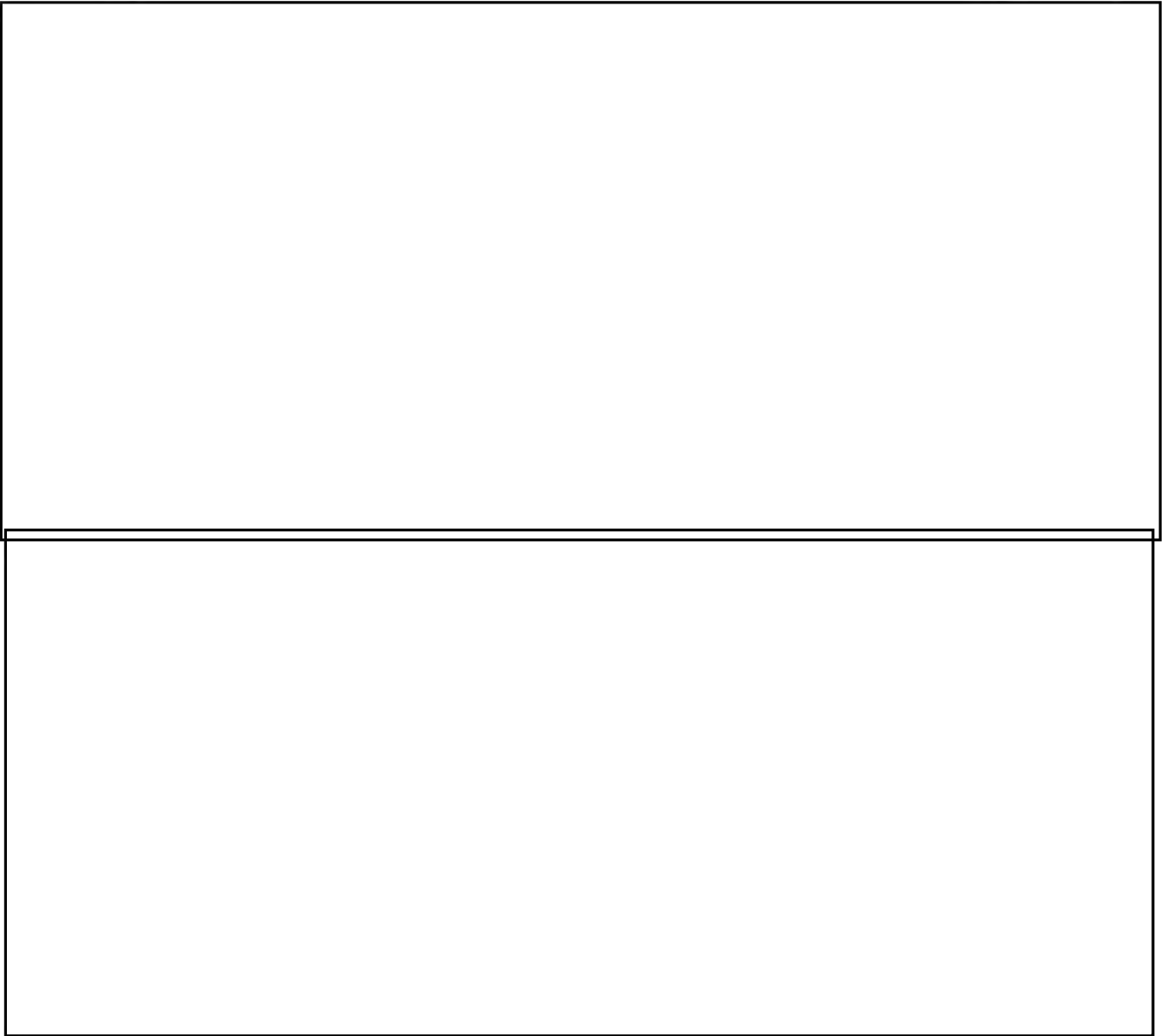
that all US bids for a peaceful solution are, ipso facto, hypocritical tactical maneuvers designed to confuse the situation, undercut support for the Communist position, and screen US military moves. The Communist belief that the US is intent on imposing a settlement by force in Vietnam is suggested in part by public statements denouncing US peace initiatives. Almost uniformly, denunciations of US peace moves are accompanied by references to US military actions which have taken place despite the US peace bids.

7. Hoang Quoc Viet, for example, in castigating the President's 7 April 1965 offer, attempted to prove his allegations by noting that "right after" the President's speech the US deployed additional combat aircraft and marine battalions to South Vietnam in clear preparation for continued military action. In denouncing the bombing suspension in May 1965, the North Vietnamese claimed that "provocative" US overflights continued during the suspension and signaled an American intent to renew military action against the North unless the DRV agreed to US terms for talks.

8. Vietnamese Communist allegations concerning the suspension of air attacks on the North which began in December 1965 were also closely coupled with charges assailing US actions in deploying new troops to Vietnam during the aerial standdown, allegedly in preparation for later armed action against the Communists. According to the Vietnamese propaganda, "reality has proven that each time the US prattles about peaceful negotiation," it takes another step in "intensifying and expanding" the war. Such charges have continued steadily through 1966. In September Pham Van Dong claimed, for example, that US talk concerning peaceful negotiations is issued prior to every new US military escalation of the war.

9. Reports from many free world visitors to North Vietnam indicate that the propensity of the Vietnamese Communists to couple their statements denouncing US peace moves with claims of simultaneous US military action is more than just a tactical propaganda device. These reports also suggest that Vietnamese statements reflect a belief that the US is intent on pursuing military action in Vietnam despite any openings for peace.

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The Historical Factor

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12. The Vietnamese Communists' distrust of US intentions stems to some extent from Marxist-Leninist philosophy, which imputes a basic dishonesty to the

capitalist powers--a dishonesty that must be guarded against by the Communists. Their own experience in dealing with the Western powers has tended to reinforce their ideological predispositions. They believe, for example, that the French moved against Ho Chi Minh's self-proclaimed Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1945 despite an agreement signed with representatives of his government recognizing its autonomy. The Vietnamese also view the aftermath of the Fountainebleau conference in 1946, at which a cease-fire agreement was reached, as a period during which the French moved to escalate the war. The final proof of Western perfidy, in the Vietnamese Communist view, was the failure of the Western powers to implement the 1954 Geneva agreement on Indochina, an agreement which the Hanoi leaders believed, if carried out, would have assured their peaceful takeover of all Vietnam.

13. It was this experience which led Pham Van Dong to say in a September 1965 speech that each time an agreement was signed with the French, it merely "gave them time to prepare their military force and draft new plans for attacks on us." In the entire course of the conflict, stated Dong, "at the time when they first started the war, as well as when they were faced with a collapse and prepared to withdraw, the French always tried to carry out their schemes to divide" and conquer us.

14. The Vietnamese Communists have long lumped the Americans with the French as dishonest Westerners. They often voiced their suspicions of the US during the sessions of the 1954 Geneva Conference. On 29 May 1954, for example, Pham Van Dong charged that while the US talked about "national unity" and peace in Vietnam, the US actions at Geneva were "merely a ruse" designed to slow progress and prevent a peaceful settlement.

[redacted] the Vietnamese Communists [redacted] felt they had been "taken in" at the time of the Geneva Accords and that the "bourgeois side" would not keep its promises. The next time, they planned to be "on their guard" and would not be so trusting. More recently, according to

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15. In the face of this view of US peace initiatives and the current and historical factors acting to influence it, there is apparently little the US can do to convince the Vietnamese Communists of its desire for a just and honorable solution in Vietnam. This is especially true when it is considered that the Vietnamese Communists also regard the specific formulation of US peace terms as unpalatable and completely unacceptable.

Section II

SPECIFICS OF US PEACE TERMS CHALLENGED

1. The public and private statements of the Vietnamese Communists also indicate that they feel the specific terms of US proposals for a settlement or for negotiations on Vietnam are formulated in a fashion which the Communists cannot accept at the present time. To a great extent, their statements on this score are only propagandistic attempts to discredit American policy. It does appear, however, that the Vietnamese Communists sincerely believe the US has not made any real concessions in its position in order to start talks. It appears also that this has reinforced their belief that the US is not really interested in a cessation of military action. They seem to feel, moreover, that US peace proposals are so formulated that acceptance would show the Communists to be dealing from a position of weakness (see also Section VI).

The Terms and Phraseology of US Peace Bids

2. Perhaps the best illustration of the latter problem arose in connection with President Johnson's offer on 5 September 1966 to make public a schedule for the withdrawal of US forces from South Vietnam if infiltration from the North were halted and DRV forces now in the South withdrawn. Hanoi speedily denounced this proposal as designed to "trick" the Vietnamese into an admission that DRV forces were actually in South Vietnam. They also claimed it constituted another attempt to "force" on the Vietnamese conditions for the withdrawal of US troops.

3. It is highly doubtful that the Vietnamese Communists, in view of their apparently optimistic estimate of the current balance of forces in Vietnam

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(see Section IV), would have accepted the US withdrawal offer without at least partial implementation, even if it were not hedged with conditions to be filled by Hanoi. It does appear from their response, however, that in the present power balance, the Vietnamese Communists will not accept any US proposal which sets conditions for them to fulfill. Such proposals are viewed as requiring an unacceptable show of weakness on their part.

4. US efforts to get negotiations under way through a suspension of the bombing of North Vietnam have so far drawn the same type of response for the same reasons. According to Hanoi, "it is starkly clear that the hoax about the conditional cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam, like the one about the conditional withdrawal of US troops, is but a trick which is part of the unconditional discussions scheme of the US."

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5. The Vietnamese Communists have often privately stressed their concern with avoiding any appearance of weakness or an implied admission of aggression against the South.

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6. Concerning the suspension of the bombing of the DRV [redacted] told by Soviet Embassy representatives [redacted] that no US offer to stop the bombing of the DRV had any chance of success if it were tied to some reciprocal action by

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the Vietnamese, such as a cessation of assistance to the Viet Cong, since to accept such an offer would constitute an admission of aggression.

Views on the US 14-Point Proposal

7. The Vietnamese Communist belief that the US has not yet made any concessions in its position on the war was clearly evident in Hanoi's treatment of the American 14-point proposal publicized in December 1965. According to Mai Van Bo, this US peace bid attempted to "create the illusion of concessions but in fact showed no change of position." Each principle set forth in the 14 points, according to Bo, "is followed by a condition" set out for the Communists which "makes the principle unworkable." This was also the position taken by the Vietnamese propagandists in their public commentary on the 14 points. Their propaganda focused on such things as the expression of US willingness to stop bombing the DRV if the Communists would "tell what would happen as a result." According to Hanoi, the bombings must be ended "unconditionally" as a unilateral act of the US.

The Effect of Communist Suspicions

8. On balance, it seems almost certain that the distrust and suspicion of the Vietnamese Communists concerning US intentions in the Vietnam war have served as a significant impediment to a termination of the conflict. They have clearly tended to reinforce Hanoi's already strong determination to fight on until the US is forced to make concessions. The Vietnamese have said so flatly on a number of occasions. A Foreign Ministry statement of 14 July 1966 protesting the US raids on petroleum storage facilities in North Vietnam, for example, asserted that the US hopes it "can bring about negotiations from a strong position and compel the Vietnamese people to lay down their arms." Such

actions are useless, the statement asserted, and only increase the Vietnamese determination to defeat the US.

9. In its response to the suspension of bombing in May 1965, the North Vietnamese party daily Nhan Dan declared that the Vietnamese people are "not used to kneeling down before any aggressor." Thus, the more the US proffers its "deceptive" peace offers, the "deeper our hatred and the firmer our resolve to annihilate them." In an April 1966 radiobroadcast denouncing Senator Mansfield's call for direct peace talks between the US, China, and the DRV, Hanoi declared that "we must deal the US more painful blows, so painful that it can no longer bear them" and must "abandon its aggressive will and recognize our stand."

10. This line is doubtless intended in part to spark popular sentiment against the US among the people of North Vietnam. It would also appear, however, to reflect the actual feelings of the Hanoi leaders. [REDACTED]

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the Vietnamese Communists has quoted Ho Chi Minh as stating that "when they bomb us, it looks as if someone with a whip in his hand were inviting us to sit down and start talking. We say: throw away your daggers and throw down your whip and we shall talk. If we sit down with you at one table under the present conditions, it will mean giving up, and we never give up."

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Section III

US GOODWILL NOT A CRITICAL ELEMENT

1. Vietnamese Communist suspicions concerning US goodwill will not be a critical factor in getting talks on the conflict started. If and when the Vietnamese decide to agree to talks, their decision will be based primarily on their assessment of the relative strategic position of the US and Communist sides. This is apparent in many of their more candid private statements and also in the impressions gathered by seasoned Western observers who have talked with them. In the middle of 1964, for example, before direct American military pressure was applied to North Vietnam, Pham Van Dong [redacted] that the Vietnamese Communists clearly understood the strategic stakes in the conflict and recognized that a "US defeat in South Vietnam would in all probability start a chain reaction that would extend much farther." The US should understand, however, said the premier, "that the principles and stakes involved are just as high" for the Communists and that this helps to "explain our determination to continue the fighting."

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2. In January 1965, the Vietnamese Communist intention to wait until the strategic situation was right was underscored by a DRV official during a visit to Cambodia. According to him, the Communists were not prepared to make any concession to hasten the American departure from Vietnam. The Vietnamese Communists were not "looking for short cuts" and would not act prematurely, but would wait until "everything had been built up correctly" before making a move to end the fighting.

3. DRV officials have continued during 1966 to maintain that the primary factor governing their policy on negotiations is their assessment of the Communist power position vis-a-vis the allies. [redacted]

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stronger than it was in the war against the French when it was "forced to negotiate an unsatisfactory settlement." Now its military situation has become so strong that it "need not again enter into negotiations from weakness."

The Korean and Laotian Experiences

4. The experiences of the free world allies with the Communists in the Korean and Laotian conflicts bear out the proposition that Communist views on the goodwill of the enemy are distinctly secondary in importance to estimates of the relative balance of forces. In the Korean conflict, initial Chinese military successes convinced the Communists that UN forces could be driven from Korea if military pressure was sustained. During this period, the Chinese remained uninterested in any kind of talks and routinely justified their position partly by describing allied offers for a negotiated settlement as insincere.

5. A series of allied advances in early 1951, followed by the blunting of the Communists' own offensives, however, left the ranks of the best Communist armies decimated. The disastrous defeats impelled the Communists to begin negotiations. There was no prior indication, however, that they planned to move in this direction. Moreover, their vituperation concerning the inadequacy, illegality, and fraud of the allied peace terms had not abated. It remained, in fact, a steady theme in Communist propaganda during the protracted discussions which ensued.

6. In Laos, the course of political negotiations was considerably more complicated than in Korea, but the Communist decisions both to engage in talks and to reach an agreement clearly resulted primarily from assessments of the strategic situation and depended only incidentally on estimates of the good intentions of the non-Communist

participants. The agreement of the North Vietnamese to the Geneva Treaty on Laos in June 1962 resulted from concern over the possibility of direct US military intervention in the Laotian fighting, which had been suggested by the deployment of US combat forces to Thailand in May. The North Vietnamese were also anxious by this time to concentrate more extensively on support of the insurgency in South Vietnam.

7. The Communists had originally agreed to the Geneva Conference in May 1961 in the belief that their gains up to that point could best be extended by continuing military pressure combined with greater political and diplomatic action. Both during and after the Geneva sessions, however, the Vietnamese continued to harp on the lack of a sincere will for peace on the non-Communist side and on its unacceptable terms for a settlement.

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Section IV

THE COMMUNIST ESTIMATE OF US STRENGTH

1. The Communists' belief that major policy concessions can eventually be forced from the US, and that negotiations are not feasible until that time, is based on faith in their ability to fight a protracted war, a conflict in which their will to persist can outlast that of the US.

2. The concept was put perhaps most succinctly

[REDACTED]

all in agreement on how the war would end. They said "it could take a man's age," and that "we have time." The "Europeans (including the US) have less time. There, governments shift, and leaders come and go. In the end, there will come a man in Washington who will say there is no sense in staying and they will leave. We are sure of this." Later, Ho Chi Minh himself reiterated the same theme [REDACTED]

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that "their special brand of primitive warfare, physical endurance, and inner fortitude, which in the past showed them equal to the Mongols and the Chinese, will permit them to gradually wear the Americans down and achieve ultimate success."

The Probable Communist Estimate

3. The available intelligence indicates that this faith in the protracted war strategy is not based solely on emotional beliefs in Vietnamese powers of endurance, but also springs from an estimate of the relative strategic position of the US and Communist forces. Hanoi appears to believe that the US will continue to employ its forces in the future along basically the same lines as at present. The Americans, in Hanoi's view, will be aiming to keep the Communist forces off balance by disrupting and destroying their bases and by attempting to trap and destroy their

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main force units. The North Vietnamese have frequently expressed the belief that the US buildup in South Vietnam may surpass 400,000 men by the end of this year. It would appear, however, that they do not believe this force will be enough to inflict a decisive defeat on the Communists.

4. They probably estimate that they will still retain a powerful hand in South Vietnam if they can maintain the bulk of the regular units intact in the face of the anticipated level of allied buildup. They will then retain the option of protracting the war into--and, if necessary, beyond--1967. This may be the main strategy behind the intensive movement of PAVN troops across the DMZ and into mountainous parts of Quang Tri Province. Fighting here from interior supply lines, connected to the DRV, with speedy refuge and probably better antiaircraft artillery available, the Communists seem bent on getting into a position from which they can indefinitely protract the conflict regardless of the military situation farther South.

5. The Vietnamese Communists apparently believe that the US will continue to be extremely reluctant to seek a basic alteration in the strategy of the war: for example, a ground invasion of the DRV. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] that even if the US were to invade North Vietnam, a protracted conflict could still be fought since the US could not conquer and occupy the North. They could take Hanoi, admitted the Vietnamese, but they "could not control the land areas any more than they can control South Vietnamese rural areas at present."

6. The Vietnamese Communists may hope that Washington will be forced to make a basic re-examination of its policy if the allies, with an American ground force of around 400,000, fail to force a decisive outcome of the war. Hanoi may hope that, at this point, the US will be willing to make concessions which would offer a realization of at least some Communist objectives in South Vietnam.

The Importance of Domestic Opposition in the US

7. An element in the Vietnamese Communist strategy of protracted war is the extent and effect of opposition to US policy on Vietnam from within the United States. The Vietnamese Communists do not view this opposition as simply a manifestation of moral reservations among American intellectuals and leftists over Washington's war policy, but believe that important opposition may develop as a result of the economic pinch of the war on the American public and business, and that such opposition may also be fanned by the continuing American casualties in Vietnam.

8. It is clear that the Vietnamese believe the US will be forced to go on an extensive wartime footing eventually. They think this will greatly increase domestic opposition, and will tend to check any heavy US escalation of the war through the commitment of considerably more troops and war material to Vietnam.

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was sure the US could not maintain the kind of war effort needed in Vietnam without being forced eventually by domestic public opinion to re-examine and modify its policy. We know that Vietnamese Communist cadres have been told by their leaders that "increased public opposition to US activities in Vietnam" could be "among the more important factors," in addition to casualties and economic costs," which would cause the "American government to desist and decide to give up and get out."

9. Despite their expectations, there is strong evidence that the Vietnamese Communists are not able to correctly gauge the real intensity or direction of US domestic opposition at any given time. In viewing the American situation, the Vietnamese are doubtless influenced by their over-all lack of sophistication on American politics and by their earlier, but not quite parallel, success in bringing pressure to bear from French public opinion on France's war policy in 1953-54.

10. The lack of sophistication of the Vietnamese Communists can be seen in their reaction to the American student protests over Vietnam policy in the fall of 1965. There was an increasing air of optimism over the strength of the student agitation in Vietnamese Communist propaganda at that time, capped by an announcement from Hanoi on 24 October that a "united front of the Vietnamese and American people has de facto taken shape." The tone of the propaganda strongly suggested that the Vietnamese were overreading the extent and depth of the protests.

11. Another indication of the Vietnamese Communist misjudgment on this score is apparent in propaganda charges that the statements of "war hawks" in the US act as a deterrent to negotiations. While such statements are designed as a tactical measure to bolster the Communist position against talks, they appear to indicate a belief in Hanoi that only a tiny minority in the US outside the administration is urging a more vigorous policy of military action and involvement in Vietnam.

12. In view of their propensity to misread the depth and direction of American domestic opposition to US policy on Vietnam, it is probable that the eventual failure of such opposition to work in the Communists' favor would exert a significant impact on their protracted war strategy. It would probably not be critical, however, unless accompanied by a serious decline in their military position.

Section V

THE EXTENT OF COMMUNIST DETERMINATION

1. All of the available evidence indicates that the dedication of the Vietnamese Communists to the unification of Vietnam under Communist hegemony is extremely strong, that this has been a consistent goal since 1954, and that the will to accomplish this objective has not been appreciably reduced by the heavier military pressure imposed on the Communists during the last two years. Many of the statements quoted in the preceding sections testify implicitly to the depth of this determination; others are offered below.

2. The ink on the Geneva agreements of 1954 was hardly dry, for example, before the Vietnamese Communists publicly asserted their determination to extend their control over South Vietnam. At the closing session of the Geneva Conference, Pham Van Dong declared that "we shall achieve the unity of Vietnam just as we have won the war." Ho Chi Minh said the next day that a "long and arduous struggle" still lay ahead and that the division of Vietnam was only a "temporary and transitional arrangement: Central, South and North Vietnam are all our land, and our country undoubtedly will be unified, the compatriots throughout our country liberated."

3. [redacted]
[redacted] them, the Vietnamese leaders told [redacted]
[redacted] "we have a very consistent, clear line, and we will never abandon it. There is nothing to discuss. The only honorable peace is that we are masters of our own country. The only question to discuss is when will the Americans go." The visitor came away with the impression that "this fantastic self-confidence and belief in themselves" is what essentially motivates and holds the Vietnamese Communists together.

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Section VI

POSSIBLE PRODUCTIVE PEACE APPROACHES

1. Since the Vietnamese Communists believe the US must be forced into a position from which it will make concessions in order to start talks, it follows that a paramount concern of the Communists is to maintain an image of strength during the fighting and particularly prior to the initiation of any talks on the war. All good evidence on Vietnamese Communist strategy has tended to confirm this proposition (see also Section II).

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Termination of the Bombing Necessary

3. In view of their concern for the maintenance of an image of strength, it is almost certain that the Vietnamese Communists will not agree to any discussions until the US stops bombing North Vietnam and promises not to resume the air attacks. This has been a completely consistent theme in the private and public statements of the Vietnamese and in the reports of Western and bloc diplomats who have talked with them. Among the

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5. As indicated in prior sections of this study, the Vietnamese have rejected every proposal by the US or other mediators which either stated or implied that the Communists must take reciprocal action in exchange for a US move of de-escalation. It is clear that Communist action on this score also stems from concern for preserving an image of strength and/or for avoiding even an implicit admission of aggressive action against South Vietnam. As long as they judge the balance of power in Vietnam along the lines outlined in Section IV of this study, it appears almost certain that any US proposal which is formulated in a manner requiring a meaningful reciprocal action by the Communists is foredoomed to rejection. It is probable, in fact, that even if such a proposal were advanced privately it would be rejected.

Possibly Acceptable Proposals

6. Given the evidence set forth in this study on the Vietnamese Communist suspicion concerning US intentions, on the unpalatability to the Communists of past

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US peace formulas, on the evident determination of the Vietnamese to achieve their objectives, and on their estimate of their present strategic position in the conflict, it appears likely at this stage of the war that only a US proposal which was accompanied by a clearcut and significant concession in American military policy which did not require a quid pro quo by the Communists would have any chance of gaining their agreement to bilateral negotiations with the US. It is possible that by means of such a concession (for example: the unconditional termination of the bombing of the DRV, or an announced end to the US troop and weapon buildup in South Vietnam), the Vietnamese Communists could be brought to agree to bilateral talks. It was the firm view [redacted] that the North Vietnamese were prepared to resume at least bilateral "contacts" with the US if Washington gave an unconditional undertaking to stop the bombing for good. Such a move by the US would test rather effectively whether there is currently a weakness which does not appear on the surface in the Vietnamese Communist position and determination on the war.

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[redacted] Hanoi would see its principal objective in any bilateral contacts with the US as securing US acceptance of the DRV's four-point formula on the war. Formal, multilateral negotiations, [redacted] would have to wait until some understanding had been achieved on the four points. It is possible, however, that the course of preliminary bilateral contacts would point the way to wider negotiations and possibly to an agreement on the termination of military action that would be acceptable to the United States.

8. We believe it at least equally possible that, despite a major US concession, the Vietnamese Communists would refuse to agree to bilateral talks or even to renewed contacts. They might take advantage of the partial respite from military pressure while demanding additional concessions before talks. They might, for example, call for the cessation of offensive air operations in Laos and the termination of strategic bombing in South Vietnam.

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Section VII

NORTH VIETNAM'S FOUR POINTS

1. Premier Pham Van Dong enunciated the four points in April 1965. They were first broadcast by Hanoi radio on 12 April and were clearly Hanoi's response to President Johnson's 7 April 1965 speech at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore. These four points have consistently been referred to by the North Vietnamese as the embodiment of the basic provisions of the 1954 Geneva agreements on Vietnam. They have been repeatedly offered as Hanoi's official position on what it sees as the basis for a political settlement in Vietnam.

2. There has been no change in the wording of the four points since they were first broadcast.

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The four points have become so much a part of Hanoi's propaganda that no public change in them is likely.

3. Aside from their propaganda value, it is certain that they represent the maximum bargaining position Hanoi would take at any negotiation conference. There are good reasons, however, for believing that some degree of flexibility has been built in. An examination of the North Vietnamese treatment of the four points, element by element, provides a good indication of just where the give is.

Point one: "Recognition of the basic national rights of the Vietnamese people--peace, independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity. According to the Geneva agreements, the US Government must withdraw from South Vietnam US troops, military personnel, and weapons of all kinds, dismantle all US military bases there, and cancel its military alliance with South Vietnam. It must end its policy of intervention and aggression in South Vietnam. According to the Geneva agreements, the US Government must stop its acts of war against North Vietnam and completely cease all encroachments on the territory and sovereignty of the DRV."

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4. This point was described in the 23 July 1966 issue of North Vietnam's party daily as the "starting point and the basis" of the four points and as the "principle of principles" for a settlement of the Vietnamese problem. It is a basic restatement of some of the points included in the 1954 Geneva agreements and undoubtedly represents Hanoi's genuinely desired goal in any political settlement.

5. On numerous occasions since April 1965, North Vietnamese leaders and authoritative spokesmen have made it clear that Hanoi does not regard the various elements of this point as proper matters for discussion. They have stated flatly that the withdrawal of US troops from South Vietnam is the "key" to a settlement of the Vietnam problem. Major General Nguyen Van Vinh, the head of both the party and government reunification commissions in Hanoi, stated in September 1965 that in order to have a political solution, "first of all," the US must "approve" the withdrawal of its troops.

On this point there has been a great deal of confusion over the past year and a half, that is, whether the withdrawal of US troops was to be a precondition to talks or was to be discussed at the negotiations table when a final solution was being arranged. North Vietnamese spokesmen in 1965 helped confuse the issue by being deliberately vague when asked to comment. When asked point blank

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whether withdrawal was a precondition for talks or something to be negotiated, Pham Van Dong replied with a smile, "both."

6. Since that time, however, Dong and other North Vietnamese spokesmen have made it clear that they do not intend the withdrawal of US forces to be a precondition for talks. What they do insist on as a precondition is "tangible proof" that the US will agree to withdraw its troops as part of a settlement. Just how this proof is to be given is not entirely clear. North Vietnamese spokesmen have hinted that it could take the form of a public pledge by the US.

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7. North Vietnam has also made it clear that it will not agree to withdraw Communist forces from South Vietnam in exchange for the withdrawal of US troops. Nguyen Van Vinh stated in his September 1965 article that Communist troops fighting in South Vietnam "will refuse to be regrouped to North Vietnam a second time," a reference to the regroupment north of most of the Viet Minh forces in South Vietnam after the signing of the 1954 agreements.

8. Although Hanoi will undoubtedly refuse to sign any agreement admitting that it has troops in South Vietnam, it would probably stage a clandestine withdrawal of at least North Vietnamese regulars as US forces were being taken out of the country. Communist documents captured on the battlefield in South Vietnam reveal that the Communists believe that if US forces are withdrawn, the Viet Cong would have nothing to fear from the South Vietnamese Army, which the Communists regard as largely ineffectual.

9. The North Vietnamese have also indicated that they are flexible on the matter of the timing of a US troop pullout. On several occasions North Vietnamese spokesmen have stated that if the US will agree to withdraw its troops the Communists will be willing to make arrangements which will enable the US not "to lose face." There have been hints that Hanoi is interested in exploring unofficially with third parties what sort of timetable might be possible if a staged withdrawal of US troops were arranged.

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Finally, although there is some flexibility built into the first point, Hanoi has also used it as the peg point for its refusal to move toward negotiations until the US completely and unconditionally ceases its air strikes against North Vietnam.

12. Despite the extensive campaign by the Communists to create the illusion that the Front is the legitimate voice of the South Vietnamese people, there are good indications that Hanoi will not insist on its demand that the Front be the only representative from South Vietnam at any multilateral negotiating conference on Vietnam.

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Point four: The peaceful reunification of Vietnam is to be settled by the Vietnamese people in both zones, without any foreign interference.

North Vietnamese spokesmen have made it clear that they consider this point as a long-term prospect. They have even attempted to portray their willingness to accept a delayed reunification as a concession to the US. Major General Nguyen Van Vinh, for example, in January 1966 stated that had the US allowed the elections called for in the 1954 Geneva agreements to take place, the country would now be reunited. He claimed that Hanoi's current willingness to postpone reunification was a clear concession to the US.

Four Points As Preconditions

14. Pham Van Dong concluded the four-point statement with the assertion that "if this basis (the four

points) is recognized, favorable conditions will be created for the peaceful settlement of the Vietnam problem, and it will be possible to consider the reconvening of an international conference along the pattern of the 1954 Geneva conference on Vietnam." The North Vietnamese have never been clear as to just what the word "recognize" was intended to mean. At one time some North Vietnamese hinted that a statement by the US that it accepted the four points as a basis for a settlement would suffice.

15. More recent remarks [redacted]

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[redacted] indicate that Hanoi's position on this point: is tougher than often had been indicated. It now seems likely that the "tangible proofs" or "actual deeds" demanded by the North Vietnamese as an earnest of US intentions in order to convene a final, multilateral conference must include a total and permanent cessation of air strikes against North Vietnam, a cessation of the buildup of US forces in South Vietnam, and probably at least a token withdrawal of some forces from that country.

16. The so-called "peace terms" of the Communist-controlled Front group in South Vietnam were set forth on 22 March 1965 interspersed within a rambling five-point statement. Essentially, the Front's five points were as follows:

- a. A condemnation of US policy in Vietnam along with a catalogue of US war "crimes" there since 1954.
- b. An expression of the determination of the Vietnamese "people" to "kick out" the US "imperialists" from Vietnam and to "liberate" South Vietnam. According to the statement, the Vietnamese will never stop fighting until their ultimate objectives of "independence, democracy, peace, and neutrality" have been obtained. The "only way out" for the US is to "withdraw" from South Vietnam. The statement declared that "at present, all negotiations are useless" on the war as

long as "the US imperialists do not withdraw all troops, weapons, and means of war from Vietnam, and as long as the Liberation Front does not have the decisive voice." By this the Front apparently meant that it should have a dominant voice in any political settlement of the conflict.

- c. A pledge of determination to "advance toward" the reunification of Vietnam.
- d. A declaration that the Front has the "full right" to receive international assistance. While relying primarily on its own force, the Front "will buy war materiel from any county," and will call "if necessary" for foreign volunteers.
- e. A call on all South Vietnamese people to join in the fight to "liberate" the South.

17. At its publication, the Front statement was primarily touted by the Viet Cong as a manifesto of their intent in the war. It was not until after Pham Van Dong's speech setting forth the DRV's four-point peace proposal that both Hanoi and the Viet Cong began to point to the Front statement as containing the Viet Cong peace terms. Subsequent Front statements have largely echoed the 22 March manifesto, differing only in that several of them hardened the Front's position on the withdrawal of US forces. A statement of 14 June 1965, for example, claimed that "all negotiations are useless" if the US imperialists "have not yet withdrawn" from South Vietnam. A Front central committee statement of 25 November 1965, however, did not attach any condition of timing to a withdrawal as a preliminary to a settlement. Occasionally, other statements by Front leaders have also implied that withdrawal is not a precondition to talks. This, for example, was the position taken by Nguyen Huu Tho, chairman of the Front, in an interview on 25 August 1966.

18. Although there is no explicit evidence to support the contention, we believe the apparent hard Front position on US withdrawal has been maintained primarily

for tactical reasons by the Viet Cong. Hanoi's own final position on this point would, we feel confident, be the deciding word if the Vietnamese Communists decided to move toward a political settlement.

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

This memorandum considers in some detail the North Vietnamese attitudes toward the US negotiating positions and depicts the North Vietnamese imperatives in the matter.

On the whole the Communist position emerges as unyielding, distrustful of the US, and confident. This is not to say that there are no crevices in the front, but they are few.

Some discussion of possibly productive approaches is contained in Section VI, starting on Page 26.

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5. It is possible that there is a faction among the Vietnamese Communist leaders which does not share this depth of feeling concerning the protraction of the war. The hard evidence on the subject, however, points to a surprising unanimity of view on continuing the struggle. The only recent evidence of debate over policy among the Communists suggests a difference of opinion mainly over how best to conduct the military side of the war, not over whether to fight or to quit. There is no evidence, either, that the morale of the DRV population is such that it will not follow the policy dictates of the leaders for the foreseeable future.

6. It does not seem likely that influences for moderation, if any, from East European Communists and/or from the Soviet Union would have any appreciable effect on the Vietnamese will to persist. A DRV diplomat said in June: "Our friends tell us we suffer too many losses and make too many sacrifices." They urge us to "compromise with the Americans as we did with the French." There are, however, "other losses and sacrifices the world does not know about" in the event of such a compromise; "this is why we are determined to continue to fight until we achieve total victory."

7. Although the direct evidence on the point is scanty, it seems probable that the Vietnamese Communists believe the US underestimates the depth of their determination in the war. They have often made such charges in their propaganda. An editorial in the party daily paper on the occasion of the DRV National

Day in September, for example, stated that "as a rule, the imperialists always meet with defeats because of their miscalculation." Because of "a misappreciation of the strength of our people," declared the editorial, US war policy has already "gone bankrupt." The paper denounced alleged US plans to throw 100,000 more troops into the fight, asserting that the "strength of our people lies in their firm determination." According to the paper "we have enough strength and determination to continue this fight until final victory."

8. It appears that the Vietnamese Communists expect a modification of US policy will come about when Washington realizes the strength of the Vietnamese will. They consistently stress their determination to key visitors who they know or suspect will report their impressions to Washington. It is impossible to judge how much of this effort is bluster to convey at least an image of strength and how much represents a candid effort to get the point of their real determination across more forcefully in the US.